



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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Marsh fire, source of complaints

Baton Rouge – Three state agencies are working together to address a marsh fire in the New Orleans East area. The Louisiana departments of Environmental Quality, Agriculture and Forestry and Wildlife and Fisheries each flew over a large area of marsh south of Lake Pontchartrain after receiving numerous calls concerning smoke and odors.

The fire has been burning since early summer and is located southeast of the I-10 Michoud Boulevard exit, in a wetlands area that is not reasonably accessible by fire fighting equipment.

“DEQ received several complaints from concerned citizens who assumed the odor and smoke were coming from landfills,” said DEQ Assistant Secretary Chuck Brown. “During the investigation into the odors, we discovered the marsh fires. We are working with the state departments of Wildlife and Fisheries and Agriculture and Forestry to rectify the situation, since DEQ lacks regulatory authority to address marshland fires.”

There are several potential causes attributed to the fire, ranging from a lighting strike to controlled burning. Private land owners are allowed to burn marsh under private land use laws. The odor is caused by vegetation and peat that has rotted because of low water levels and warm temperatures causing the area to dry out and decompose. A lightning strike or some other cause such as spontaneous combustion during dry weather conditions may have caused the vegetation to burn, resulting in smoke from the marsh fires.

Because of the variable wind directions, the odor and smoke changes everyday. The smell is normally pungent during early morning hours or late evening hours when the wind velocity is low and the humidity is typically high.

DEQ also sent the Mobile Air Monitoring Lab, known as the MAML, to conduct air monitoring. Fires of this type result in particulates and products of incomplete combustion. However, the sampling results indicate that the levels of the particulates and other substances are not present in amounts that would create adverse impact to human health and the environment. All agencies will continue to monitor the situation as long as the burn continues.